

PROD. 15-4

CLASSIFICATION: REST

Title of Report **The Minority-Area Policy of Communist China in Perspective**

1 Dec 59

Report Series No **CIA/RR 9/I 59-51** None

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CIA/R/S/I 9-54
1 December 1959

THE MINORITY-AREA POLICY OF COMMUNIST CHINA IN PERSPECTIVE

(The following paragraphs summarize an article with the above title which appeared in the Geographic Intelligence Review, Number 57, CIA/R/IR 58-1, April 1959, S.)

Progress Toward the Unified State: Between 1954 and 1958 the administrative structure set up by the Chinese Communist regime to implement the autonomy concept moved from what might be called a romantic youthful stage, which was designed to appeal to local aspirations of non-Han peoples concentrated in various parts of China; through a more intense mature stage, in which the nationalities cadres emerged as an actively participating force in local government; into a repressive third stage, in which the apparent objective is the total participation by minorities in the construction of a Communist state. The degree of territorial expansion of "autonomous" administrative units during the second stage can be seen from a comparison of CIA Map 26970 (China: Communist Autonomous Administrative Units, November 1958) with a similar map of 1954 date (Map 13517).

Policy and Practice at the Province Level: Interesting problems were involved in the erection of the 4 province-level autonomous regions (AR). In the Kwangsi Chuang AR, the entire province was made the unit of autonomy for economic reasons, despite the scanty distribution of Chuang population in its eastern portion. The anti-Chinese attitudes of the Hui (Chinese Moslems) raised difficulties in delineating the area of the exceptionally small Ningxia Hui AR when it was carved out of Kansu Province. In the Sinkiang Uighur AR, despite the preponderance of the Uighurs, the broad distribution of other minorities has made the resulting structure of sub-

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CIA/RM 0/1 19-51
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provincial autonomous units complex. In the Inner Mongolian AR, Mongols are outnumbered by Chinese by more than 7 to 1, and the region itself lacks economic unity but historic, cultural, physiographic and strategic factors give the IMAR some degree of physical and social unity.

Pattern and Objectives of Recent Developments: Some high-ranking nationalities cadres who lingered too long over the problem of "local nationalism" -- i.e., problems of proportional representation and of extension of the concept of administrative autonomy -- were censured as deviationists in 1957 and 1958. In order to hold the line against over-extension of the autonomy concept, the strongest argument of "local nationalists," the constitutional precedent of the USSR's theoretically voluntary union of republics, was renounced outright. In 1957 and 1958, to advocate self-determination for nationalities by harking back to the older Soviet model of "federal republics" became deviationist, antiproletarian, and antisocialistic.

Prospects: Except for a few peoples such as the Tibetans, China's ethnic minorities represent a diminishing weakness in the organizational framework of the country, but a potential source of embarrassing doctrinal difference between Communist China and the USSR. The institution of local and regional autonomy may not turn out to be a permanent structure. Changes and revisions will continue, but the present situation may represent virtually the maximum territorial extent of autonomous administrative units. Nationalities cadres, as such, may be developing a sense of mutual interest among themselves which may conceivably make them a perceptible political force within the PRC itself.